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SUBJECT: REINCARNATE LAMA DISCUSSES GOVERNMENT PLANS FOR
SELECTION OF THE NEXT DALAI LAMA

Classified By: Political Internal Unit Chief Susan Thornton.
Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: According to a well-respected reincarnate lama from Gansu Province, the Chinese government has a secret plan to select the next reincarnation of the Dalai

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Lama, but cautioned that people would not respect a Government choice. The Rinpoche said the Chinese Government appears to be waiting for the Dalai Lama to pass away, due to the mistaken notion that the "Tibet issue" will then disappear. The Rinpoche said he appreciated the United States' consistent advocacy for human rights in Tibet. While he lamented the Government's lack of enforcement of rights guaranteed in China's constitution, he was optimistic democracy would eventually grow in China. Comment: Dorshi Rinpoche, who was open in expressing his opinions about the selection of the next Dalai Lama, has clearly managed to walk a fine political line, earning tolerance from the Government and the devotion of local Tibetan Buddhists. End Summary and Comment.

¶2. (C) On a February 5-8 joint Chengdu-Beijing reporting trip to Gansu Province, Congenoff met privately in the capital city of Lanzhou with Dorshi Rinpoche (strictly protect), a reincarnate lama and Abbot of Tiantang Monastery in Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County. Dorshi Rinpoche (71 years old) is also a Professor of Tibetan literature, philosophy and Tibetan Buddhism at Lanzhou's Northwest National Minorities University. He is one of the most highly respected religious figures in Gansu Province and has many Han and Tibetan religious students.

The Next Dalai Lama

¶3. (C) Asked about the Chinese Government's plans for the selection of the next Dalai Lama, Dorshi Rinpoche said that the Government had a plan, but that it was a secret internal matter. He asserted that if the Government identifies a reincarnation of the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan people would not respect the choice. Dorshi Rinpoche commented that the selection process is a "matter of faith for ordinary people, not a matter of politics." People would see a government selection only as a political "Beijing Dalai Lama," not a "Tibetan Dalai Lama."

¶4. (C) Dorshi Rinpoche likened such a scenario to Beijing's selection of the Panchen Lama. He explained that according to Buddhist tradition, the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama identify each other, and that historically, there is no governmental role in the process. Tibetan people verbally show respect for "Beijing's Panchen," he stated, but Beijing's Panchen "will never win people's hearts -- he will never be the spiritual leader of the

Tibetan people."

¶ 15. (C) When asked about the discussions between the Chinese Government and representatives of the Dalai Lama, Dorshi Rinpoche was decidedly downbeat. The Dalai Lama is not asking for independence, but only real autonomy under the Chinese constitution, Dorshi stated. The majority of Chinese people, however, are unaware of what the Dalai Lama is advocating because such information is not publicly available. The Chinese government leads people to believe the Dalai Lama is calling for independence, he said. Dorshi Rinpoche said the Chinese Government appears to be waiting for the Dalai Lama to pass away. The Government believes that after the Dalai Lama dies, the "Tibet problem will go away." That view, however, is oversimplified. Tibet is not merely an issue of the Dalai Lama, he said, noting that "Tibetan politics will continue to exist."

¶ 16. (C) The Chinese Government should take advantage of the time before the Dalai Lama dies to address the Tibetan issue, according to Dorshi Rinpoche. The Dalai Lama represents the thoughts and ideas of many Tibetans and has the ability to influence their behavior. Tibetans inside China listen to the Dalai Lama. For example, when the Dalai Lama asked Tibetans to stop wearing wild animal skins, they immediately took action. There are many student groups outside of China, such as the Tibetan Youth Congress, who may resort to violence after the Dalai Lama passes away, Dorshi Rinpoche said.

Human Rights, Religious Freedom

¶ 17. (C) Turning to the subject of human rights, Congenoff asked if the Rinpoche had heard about the case of the shooting at the Nagpa La border crossing to Nepal in September 2006 in which a Tibetan nun was killed. He

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claimed not to have heard of the case, was visibly disturbed and became quiet for several minutes. Dorshi Rinpoche said the United States was one of the only countries that still cared about advocating for human rights and religious freedom in China.

¶ 18. (C) The Rinpoche stated that China should follow its own constitution. The Government says one thing in international fora, but then does another. China claims human rights protections in its constitution, but does not enforce the law. He gave an example of a Han Chinese freelance writer who recently went to Lhasa and asked if there was religious freedom in Tibet. Ordinary Tibetans told the writer that "religious freedom" was a show for foreigners. The Rinpoche added that Wang Lixiong, writer and husband of the well-known Tibetan writer Oser, writes articles critical of China's Tibet policy. Dorshi said such writings are important to encourage reflection on China's Tibet problem.

¶ 19. (C) Dorshi Rinpoche told Congenoff he had downloaded and reflected on the speech President Bush gave at Tsinghua University in 2002 in which he said a nation could not survive without religious faith. He said he agreed with the message that faith could play a constructive role in society. When asked if a majority of Chinese agreed with this view, the Rinpoche replied affirmatively. People know religion is important and that is why there are so many Buddhists in inland China. He asserted there might even be more Han Chinese Buddhists than Tibetan Buddhists. This includes Chinese who are government officials, military and business people. He said in public they talk about Leninism and Marxism, but in their homes, they have statues and scriptures and practice Buddhism. Dorshi Rinpoche added that he had many Han students. Many are interested in learning about Buddhism's role in enterprise development, including treatment of one's workers, he said.

¶10. (C) In spite of his concerns about rights protection, Dorshi Rinpoche said he was optimistic about the future of democracy in China. He said that while China currently only has village level elections, it will eventually move toward broader representation. When China has provincial-level elections, he asserted, then China will have true democracy. The growth of democracy is inevitable, Dorshi Rinpoche said, and "the government cannot stop it -- 1.3 billion people have 1.3 billion ideas."

TAR Leadership

¶11. (C) When queried on the politics of the current leadership of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and Party Secretary Zhang Qingli, Dorshi Rinpoche said the TAR

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leaders are not decision makers, they only implement what the central government tells them to do. He did not credit TAR officials for creative thinking, noting that they are "dogmatic" and only carry out central policy without analyzing it. The Rinpoche mentioned the recent ban on participation in the December Gaden Ngachoe religious festival in Lhasa, saying it was a violation of everyone's constitutional rights.

Monastic Education

¶12. (C) Turning to the subject of monastic education, Dorshi Rinpoche commented that most monks are not able to get a high quality religious education. He cited Labrang Monastery as an exception to this rule, noting that it was able to restore traditional religious education in 1982. The Geshe exam, the highest degree in Tibetan Buddhism, does not test the same level of knowledge it once did, he stated. In terms of political education for monks, the Rinpoche explained that there are two types of situations. In the TAR, Democratic Management Committee (DMC) members are sent by the government and include representatives of the Public Security and National Security Bureaus who carry out numerous political education activities. Outside the TAR, such as in Labrang Monastery in Gansu Province, DMC members are only monks and not government officials, so there are considerably fewer political activities, although the monks are still required to conduct political classes.

Comment

¶13. (C) Dorshi Rinpoche is one of the most well respected religious figures in Gansu Province. As evidenced by his academic position as well as his connections with large numbers of Han Chinese Buddhists, he has managed to walk a

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fine political line and earn tolerance from the government while maintaining the devotion of local Tibetans. The Rinpoche's willingness to offer candid comments on sensitive subjects likely reflects both the less constrained atmosphere in Lanzhou and the Rinpoche's confidence in his personal standing with local authorities.

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